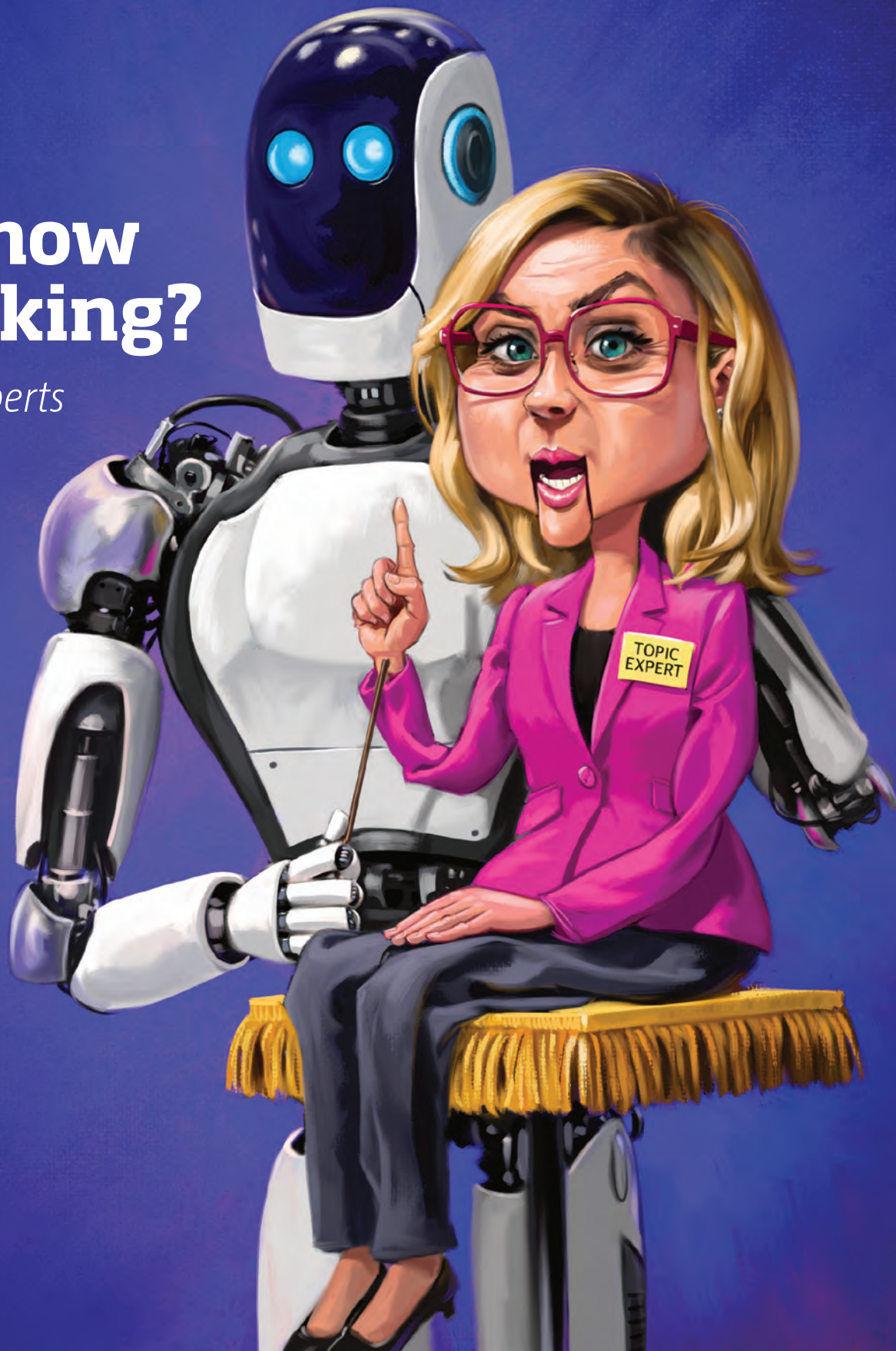


# theJournalist

WWW.NUJ.ORG.UK | APRIL-MAY 2026

## Do you know who's talking?

*Beware of fake AI experts*



# Contents



**W**e all know that quotes are a vital component of journalism – they are essential for getting all sides of the story, speaking to a witness of an event, adding an expert's opinion. But what happens if the generators of those quotes don't actually exist?

In our cover feature, Stephanie Power talks to a journalist whose suspicions about one person he was emailing led him to discover a whole host of 'experts' who could only be reached online – never on a phone – because they were in fact AI creations.

One interaction that journalist Martin Shipton had which was most definitely real and not AI was when police smashed down his front door in the early hours of the morning with a search warrant. He describes his experiences on Page 6.

In our regular features, Ruth Addicott speaks to journalists who covered the aftermath of the Magdalene laundries scandals in Ireland, and Ray Snoddy looks at whether the Government's initiative to boost local news is likely to bear fruit.

We are also on the move – Jeff Farrell looks back on reporting in Venezuela and Eugene Costello reports on press trips and their possible tax implications.

I hope you enjoy the latest edition of your magazine.

*Christie*

**Christine Buckley**  
Editor

@mschrisbuckley



**Editor**  
journalist@nuj.org.uk  
**Design**  
Surgerycreations.com  
info@surgerycreations.com  
**Advertising**  
Square7media  
Tel: 020 3832 2879  
hello@square7media.co.uk  
**Print**  
Warners  
www.warners.co.uk  
**Distribution**  
GB Mail  
www.gb-mail.co.uk

**NUJ**  
72 Acton Street  
London WC1X 9NB  
info@nuj.org.uk  
www.nuj.org.uk  
Tel: 020 7843 3700  
**Manchester office**  
nujmanchester@nuj.org.uk  
**Glasgow office**  
nujscotland@nuj.org.uk  
**Dublin office**  
info@nuj.ie  
ISSN: 0022-5541



Cover  
Howard McWilliam

## Main feature

14 **The rapid rise of the fake expert**  
Major titles quote AI phantoms

## News

- 03 **One in 10 BBC jobs to be cut**  
Fears over quality and workloads
- 04 **Government boost for local news**  
Initiative follows NUJ campaign
- 05 **Women journalists suffer daily attacks**  
Online abuse must not be 'normalised'

## Features

- 10 **When taxes outstrip earnings**  
HMRC targeting travel writers
- 12 **Drugs, guns and guerillas**  
A correspondent's life in Venezuela
- 16 **An AI battle is won ... but not the war**  
Tech firms won't get freebies
- 22 **How to get that novel published**  
Lowdown on agents ... and getting paid

## Regulars

- 20 **On our patch**
- 26 **Obituaries**

## On media

It's good news for a change  
Page 09



## Arts

The women who defied a huge US corporation  
Page 24



## And finally...

We love fear and loathing  
Page 27



Access all the latest NUJ news and views by scanning the QR code here or by visiting [www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk)



# One in 10 jobs to go at the BBC

**THE UNION** has condemned the BBC's plans to cut around 2,000 jobs, urging the broadcaster to engage meaningfully with workers and trade unions and reconsider its proposals.

The corporation announced the cuts at an all-staff meeting in mid April.

BBC management said that between 1,800 and 2,000 jobs – about one in 10 of the workforce – could be cut across various departments. In February the corporation announced a further 10 per cent cut to its total costs by the end of 2028-29.

The move came shortly after the departure of Tim Davie as director general in early April and ahead of the start of his successor Matt Brittin in mid May.

The BBC is currently being led by temporary director general Rhodri Talfan Davies,



AMY KARLE

who has been director of nations since 2021 and is currently leading the BBC's work on generative AI.

In the meeting with all staff, the corporation's management also outlined spending reductions – including on travel, attending external events and commissioning freelancers – in addition to controls on recruitment.

NUJ members have already reported a reduction in the

number of freelance shifts available across production teams, and a lack of recruitment into vacant posts. The NUJ has raised its concerns with the BBC about the impact these changes have on already overworked journalists.

Laura Davison, the NUJ's general secretary, said: "Plans for more brutal job cuts are wrong, damaging and will cause uncertainty

and distress for workers at the BBC.

"Previous rounds of cuts have led to reduced programming, loss of experience, unmanageable workloads, fewer opportunities and have significantly hit staff morale. These cuts severely undermine the corporation's ability to fulfil its core purposes: providing quality journalism and programming that informs, educates and entertains.

"The plans for further cuts follow years of real-terms budget reductions and relentless cost-saving measures which have impacted core parts of the corporation. This can't go on. The BBC cannot provide quality journalism without the talented and experienced workers who make it



**Plans for further cuts follow years of real-terms budget reductions and relentless cost-saving measures**

**Laura Davison**  
**NUJ general secretary**

## Strike vote at STV after zero pay offer

**NUJ** and Bectu members working at STV News have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action in a pay dispute. The strike ballot is one of the first to be held under the new Employment Rights Act.

In the NUJ ballot 84 per cent voted in favour of strike

action and 94 per cent for action short of a strike on a turnout of 73.5 per cent. In the ballot run by Bectu, which represents technical staff, 73 per cent voted for strike action and 82 per cent for action short of a strike on a turnout of 57 per cent.

The ballot began on

February 18 - the day large parts of the Employment Rights Act came into force. The mandate for legally held industrial action is now 12 months, instead of six months and only 10 days' notice for industrial action is needed compared with two weeks previously.

STV management have so far refused to move on a zero per cent pay offer, blaming financial constraints.

STV said recently that STV News at 6 was the most watched news programme in Scotland for the 7th year in a row and average monthly online views of STV News had

more than doubled in 2025 to 66 million.

Nick McGowan-Lowe, NUJ national organiser for Scotland, said: "Journalists and technical staff have worked hard to make STV News at 6 the most popular news programme and instead of being rewarded, they are being made to pay for the debts run up under chief executive Rufus Radcliffe."

## Win at ITV after lengthy negotiations

**THE UNION'S** chapel at ITV has secured a pay rise of up to four per cent for staff and the reinstatement of a redundancy policy.

ITV journalists will receive a four per cent pay rise if they earn up to £60,000; three per cent if they earn between £60,000 and £100,000; and two per cent for those earning more than £100,000. The offer also includes a £750 non-consolidated payment.

A non-pro rata £47,500 minimum redundancy payment has also been reimplemented until December 31 2026.

The pay claim was originally submitted at the start of September 2025, with negotiations continuing over the following months. During that time, members strongly rejected offers from management before the latest agreement was

reached. The offer was also accepted by ITV members at Bectu and Unite.

Martin Fisher, NUJ ITV chapel rep, said: "These were very difficult negotiations and we sensed there was a strong feeling from members of the joint unions that another below-inflation pay deal would not be accepted and that members wanted something more. This proved to be the case with the company's offer being rejected by ballot twice.

"I think what made the difference this year was how Unite, NUJ and Bectu all stood together and supported each other. Having a united front made a massive difference around the negotiating table and ultimately forced the company to both improve their offer.



# Women face daily online attacks at work

**THREE-QUARTERS** of female journalists suffer online violence at work, Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, told a fringe meeting at the TUC's women's conference in March in Bournemouth.

She spoke to delegates on a panel chaired by Sarah Woolley of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union that included Jackie Marshall of the Prison Officers' Association, Annila Saghir of the RMT and Maria Chondrogianni of the University and College Union.

Davison described the NUJ's Journalists' safety tracker, which allows journalists to report abuse and captures information on strategic lawsuits against public participation. It is part of the union's engagement with the government through the national committee for the safety of journalists.



Davison said: "It's clear that journalists are the target of shocking abuse and harassment both online and in person, and this restricts their ability to carry out their work."

Davison said that gathering the data itself can be challenging because "abuse is unacceptably normalised". Taking time to report incidents can be an additional emotional burden, "particularly in newsrooms where resources have been hollowed out over the years".

"The Tracker highlighted a worrying pattern of violent, graphic abuse of women journalists. In some instances, women reported daily rape and death threats."

Citing UNESCO statistics from 2025, she said that 75 per cent of women journalists experienced online violence while doing their jobs. The tracker revealed the majority of the online abuse occurred on X/Twitter.

Davison shared the harrowing case of "one woman

who received anonymous rape threats deleted the emails because of a stiff upper lip culture in the office and felt too embarrassed to share it with anyone or escalate the issue".

She said: "This abuse has a fundamental impact on the individuals carrying out their work, but it also impacts all of us because it is fundamentally important that journalists have the ability to carry out their jobs."

Other speakers shared stories of misogynist abuse experienced daily by union members in a variety of sectors.

Annila Saghir, RMT women's advisory committee vice chair, said: "It's easy for women to find a reason as to why we have been assaulted and blame ourselves. Whereas a man wouldn't. He would know he was assaulted and report it."



**Abuse is unacceptably normalised. The Tracker highlighted a worrying pattern of violent, graphic abuse at women journalists**

**Laura Davison**  
NUJ general secretary

ZUMA PRESS, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

## 'Dream come true' for Telegraph buyer

**AXEL SPRINGER**, the German publishing group that owns Bild and Die Welt, has agreed to buy The Telegraph for £575 million in cash, describing it as a dream come true.

The deal, which has been nodded through by the government, beat an

agreement between current owner Redbird IMI and Daily Mail owner DMGT, which was going to pay an initial £400 million and a subsequent £100 million. But that bid raised competition concerns.

Axel Springer expressed an

interest in the auction for The Telegraph in 2023.

The German group, which owns Politico and Business Insider in the UK, tried to buy The Telegraph when it was up for sale in 2004 but was beaten by the Barclay family. In 2023, Lloyds Bank took

over the business owing to debts of £1 billion

Axel Springer's chief executive Mathias Dopfner (pictured right) said the Telegraph had big growth potential.

**Denis MacShane, Page 17**



John Gurd presented with life membership by Ray Tostevin

## Hardy souls celebrate as John made life member

**TWO** dozen NUJ members in Dorset gathered at the King's Arms Hotel in Dorchester in February to celebrate the award of life membership to photographer and cameraman John Gurd, *James Garrett writes.*

John's certificate was presented by South-West England branch chair Ray Tostevin in the hotel's Casterbridge Room, named after Thomas Hardy's novel, much of which was written there.

It is also where the former NUJ Dorset branch used to meet - and where John was inducted into the union 42 years ago.

John was joined by long-standing union members including Geoff Moore, former father of chapel at the Dorset Echo, and retired BBC South Today producer and reporter, Chris

Coneybeer, as well as newer recruits Jason and Deb Cridland, who edit Dorset Eye, and Katie Dancey-Downs, editor of Index on Censorship's magazine.

John joined the NUJ in 1984, just after starting to freelance for the Bridport News, Dorset Echo, Western Gazette and Western Daily Press. After 15 years, he took a staff job at the Bridport News until he was made redundant in 2016 by Newsquest.

He returned to freelance writing, as well as filming for the BBC and ITN. "Strangely," he recalled, "While at school, I started making 8mm films and wanted to be a film cameraman. It didn't happen at the time, but it got me interested in photography."

# Local news to get government boost

**THE UNION** has welcomed the government's Local Media Strategy – 'the first action plan to back local news in a generation', according to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Lisa Nandy, culture secretary, said it showed 'the future of news is local' and is 'essential to a cohesive country'. She added this was 'the start - not the end point – and we recognise there is more to do'.

The strategy includes:

- A local news fund of up to £12 million over two years to support 'digital innovation' and 'fill news deserts'

- Increased annual funding of £1 million for community radio over three years, to sustain 400 existing stations and encourage development

'in underserved areas'

- An Inspiring the Future campaign based in the north west focused on developing media literacy skills and promoting journalism as a career to young people from diverse backgrounds

- Promoting the Newspapers for Schools news library – a scheme offering digital access to 150 local and national news titles to pupils and teachers in state schools

- Establishing a regional media forum in the west of England to 'improve the relationship' between local journalists and public services

- A review of public notices, including of council decisions and alcohol licensing notices

- Greater use of hyperlocal and local media for



LAUREN HURLEY

government advertising.

The NUJ campaigned for a number of these measures in its News Recovery Plan, including investment in hyperlocal advertising, nationwide media literacy, promotion of journalism

education and access to local news, and the establishment of a Journalism Foundation with government grants.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, said: "We welcome the acknowledgment of the essential role our members play in improving social cohesion and local democracy.

"The establishment of a government-backed fund is recognition that the sector is too important to allow the market to decide its fate.

"We support measures to promote media literacy, journalism education and access to news. The government should also consider interest-free loans for journalism students as well as vouchers and tax credits to boost subscriptions."



**The future of news is local' and is 'essential to a cohesive country**

**Lisa Nandy**  
Culture secretary

## Ukraine union chief visits NUJ



TIM DAWSON

**THE NUJ** welcomed Sergiy Tomilenko, president of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine, to the union's London office in March.

He thanked NUJ general secretary Laura Davison for the union's support and for donations made by NUJ groups and members to the International Federation of

Journalists' safety fund, which has helped journalists with equipment and facilities during the four-year-old war with Russia.

According to the Article 19 organisation, a human rights campaign group that defends free speech and information, in the past four years, 16 journalists have been killed while reporting from Ukraine, while 62 others have been injured.

It said that 26 Ukrainian journalists are being held in Russian custody, mostly on charges of 'terrorism' or 'espionage'.

Viktoriia Roshchyna, a Ukrainian journalist, died after a year in Russian detention aged 27. She had been captured in 2023 near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station. She had made several reporting trips into the occupied territories.

## Marching against the far right

**NUJ** activists and members joined thousands who gathered in London in March for the Together Alliance demonstration to show resistance to the far right.

Those marching under the union's banners included Laura Davison, general secretary and Roger McKenzie, co-chair of the Black Members' Council, pictured right with Natasha Hirst, co-chair of the Equality Council.

According to Together Alliance, half a million people attended the march, though the Metropolitan Police reported an estimate of 50,000 attendees.

The march, which brought together people

of all ages and backgrounds, was marked by a strong sense of collective unity with thousands of trade union members filling up the streets. Dozens of NUJ members marched next to colleagues from Equity and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, united behind banners stating, "creative workers together against the far right", displaying a shared commitment across the creative and media sector.

Speakers including Diane Abbott, Jeremy Corbyn, Billy Bragg, Zack Polanski and Hannah Spencer addressed the crowds with at the starting point on Park Lane and the end point in Whitehall.



AWIL MOHAMOUD

# Data seized in dawn raid

Police are using a law to impound devices and data. **Martin Shipton** reports

**A** dawn police raid on my home, which resulted in the seizure of my iPhone, my current and past laptops and my passport, has grave implications for all journalists.

Eight members of the Metropolitan Police's counter-terrorism squad travelled to Cardiff with a search warrant signed by an Old Bailey judge.

I have unwittingly been caught up in an investigation into alleged spying for China because three years ago I went with a friend, David Taylor, a political consultant, on an expenses-paid trip to Hong Kong to meet a representative of a Shanghai-based think tank. He had had previous dealings with the think tank and had been invited to bring another 'expert' along with him. As far I was concerned, it was an interesting 'jolly'.

The trip turned out to be largely tourism focused, with me as the ad-hoc tour guide as the others had not visited the former British colony before. The think tank rep – who, like many Chinese, had a Western nickname, in his case Michael – didn't raise any searching questions. He asked about how people in the UK perceived China. Nothing that could remotely be described as secret was raised or discussed.

When the police officers smashed their way into my home, I had no idea what the raid was about. Coming out of sleep, my first thought was the banging and shouting noises were being made by someone seeking to wreak vengeance for a story I had written. The leading officer served me with the search warrant, but refused to tell me what it was all about.

It was only several hours later, when my editor told me via a neighbour's phone that Taylor and two others had been arrested for suspected espionage relating to China, that it occurred to me that the police interest in me related to the trip to Hong Kong in 2023.

Unlike the other three – all of whom had worked for Labour politicians – I had not been arrested. I had nothing to hide and gave a voluntary statement to the police about the Hong Kong trip. The police left my home 13 hours after their early arrival.

To say that I was dumbfounded by what had happened seems inadequate. I've had an adventurous career in journalism that has lasted nearly 50 years so far, but I never expected to be raided by counter-terrorism police. I can certainly add the raid to my list of good reasons for being a member of the NUJ.

General secretary Laura Davison, who I've known since she was an organiser for newspapers and I was the group father of chapel for Reach, was in touch very quickly and got me represented by law firm Bindmans. I got my passport back after it was argued my rights under the European Convention on Human Rights had been breached.

The other issue of vital importance relates to the police's use of an untested piece of recent legislation to bypass normal protections for journalistic material. The National Security Act 2023 has superseded the Official Secrets Act, which for more than a century was used to prosecute individuals



Martin Shipton and his damaged, boarded-up door after the police raid

charged with espionage offences.

Late last year, a case against two defendants charged with spying for China was discontinued because China is not regarded by the UK government as an 'enemy power', as required under the Official Secrets Act. Taylor and the two other suspects had not

been arrested under the Official Secrets Act but under the National Security Act. Equally, the warrant authorising the search of my home was issued under this new act.

Over the years, the protection of confidential journalistic material has been recognised by the judicial system, and police officers have had to convince judges there are good grounds for overriding this. The bar is set high and court orders should not be made lightly. The NUJ, of course, argues that the ability of journalists to undertake their enquiries in confidence and with sources being protected is essential in a free and open society.

The National Security Act contains nominal safeguards for journalists, with police obliged to apply for and justify the issuing of a "production order" if they want access to confidential journalistic material – something I wasn't informed about in advance or given an opportunity to make representations about. Because it was passed so recently, there is no case law. For the sake of all journalists, it's important to ensure that our vital protections remain intact and can't be bypassed.

**When the police officers smashed their way into my home, I had no idea what the raid was about**

A referendum showed overwhelming support for the publicly funded national news outlet, says **Rob Hyde**



# Swiss public vote to protect broadcaster

**S**wiss voters have voted No to a proposal that would have triggered major cuts at the national broadcaster.

As Britain continues to debate the future of the BBC licence fee, nearly 62 per cent of Swiss voters in a national referendum opposed a proposal that would have sharply cut funding of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) and downsized its activity.

Known as the Halving Initiative, it would have reduced the annual household media levy from roughly £300 to around £180 and removed company contributions altogether.

Analysts said all this would bring severe disruption, stripping the broadcaster of more than £540 million a year – between 35 and 40 per cent of its budget. This would have forced sweeping newsroom cuts and dismantled parts of the overall operation.

Not a single one of the country's 26 cantons backed the measure. Martin Jungfer, a Swiss journalist who works in

the country's digital media economy, said the scale of the referendum result was striking.

Jungfer is head of content at Digitec Galaxus, Switzerland's largest online retailer, where he oversees editorial content. Before moving into the digital sector, he spent years in traditional journalism and newsroom development, including on digitisation and audience strategy for regional papers and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

Speaking to *The Journalist*, he said: "The vote was surprisingly clear. For me, that is a sign that the Swiss population recognises the necessity of a publicly funded broadcaster and appreciates it."

Jungfer said repeated referendums also show Swiss voters continuing to support the licence fee model.

"The Swiss population has clearly shown that the current model of financing through a licence fee is acceptable," he added.

"Abolition of the fee was rejected years ago, and now even a major reduction in its level has been rejected."

He said the Swiss vote may be of interest to countries such as Britain where the future of licence-fee funded broadcasters is politically contested.

"For me, there is no truly independent private digital media," he said. "Either they are dependent on the political views of their owners or they are economically dependent on advertising revenue and therefore rely on mechanisms such as clickbait."

The referendum is part of a longer political battle over the role of public media in Switzerland. In 2018, 72 per cent of voters rejected a more radical proposal – known as No Billag – that would have scrapped the licence fee entirely.

For Holger Alich, deputy editor-in-chief of *Handelszeitung*, a Swiss business paper, the referendum shows the public values the broadcaster's work.

"Trust in SRG SSR remains high," he told *The Journalist*. "Media consumers want a broad programme and are obviously satisfied with what SRG offers."

"In many countries, there are similar discussions about publicly funded broadcasters such as the BBC. The supporters of the initiative indirectly wanted to challenge what they see as left-leaning or irrelevant content."

"They believed that reducing the contribution would force the SRG to concentrate its programmes and make them less political."

He also referred to the impact of the broadcaster's size and resources.

"The public broadcaster is the only media organisation large enough to control institutions effectively," he said.

Professor Vinzenz Wyss, who teaches journalism at Zurich University of Applied Sciences, said the vote reflects the role SRG plays in Switzerland.

"We know from surveys that SRG enjoys higher trust than many other media, especially compared with social media. In all language regions and all cantons, the initiative was rejected. That is a strong vote of confidence," he told *The Journalist*.

He said the decision also reflected concerns about the reliability of content.

"For many voters, it was less important to save around £90 or £100 a year than to strengthen reliable public information in times of disinformation," he said.

"Because the business model of private media companies is collapsing, public service media must be strengthened to maintain journalistic competition and to fulfil the role of the fourth estate."

**For many voters, it was less important to save around £90 or £100 a year than to strengthen reliable public information**

# End of an era for the NPC

**Jenny Sims** reports on changes at the National Pensioners Convention



For years, the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) has been struggling financially.

To survive, affiliates including the NUJ agreed to a special meeting to vote on its dissolution and enable it to go forward as a company limited by guarantee.

It was a sad day but an inevitable one, as money and time had run out, leaders told the meeting in February.

More than 120 delegates, including three from the NUJ, voted: 97 for and 24 against, with no abstentions.

It's likely that many who voted in favour were reluctant, expressing concerns about the lack of clarity about the democracy, transparency and accountability of the future company.

But their fundamental belief in the need for the NPC to continue as the biggest nationwide organisation representing older people and promises by national officers that the legacy values of Jack Jones would be maintained won them over.

Jones created the NPC, a network of union retired members' associations and pensioner groups, when he retired because there was no single national organisation representing pensioners' interests at the time. The first convention, held in Central Hall, Westminster, was attended by about 2,500 older people.

The NPC has played an important role in lobbying the government regularly on issues affecting older people, including

state pensions, health and social care, and universal benefits.

Its successes include helping secure the introduction of the free bus pass, the winter fuel allowance, reduced VAT on fuel and changes so state pensions are not stopped after a short hospital stay.

It held many rallies and demonstrations, and used to draw thousands to its annual Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool. In recent years, numbers dropped to hundreds and just annual general meetings were held.

Over time, the NPC has grown to work in partnership with other major bodies including Age UK, Independent Age and the Centre for Ageing Better.

Current campaigns include safeguarding the triple lock, restoring the winter fuel allowance for all pensioners, calling for a national care service in England and the creation of a commissioner for older people and ageing in England (Wales and Northern Ireland have had such commissioners for many years).

The NUJ joined as an affiliate in 1999 and has played an active role, electing NUJ members to the NPC's executive, and sending attendees to its biennial delegate conference (BDC) and other meetings.

The NPC's digital inclusion campaign, Connections for All, and the creation of a digital working party were the results of a NUJ motion at its BDC early in 2019.

NUJ 60+ council members continue to play an active role in that campaign and the digital working party as well as



CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/GUARDIAN/EYEVINE



Visitors to the delegate meeting in Blackpool: rally against cuts to winter fuel payments

GUY BELL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

both the pensions and housing working parties.

Last year, the NUJ contributed to the NPC's consultation, *Need for Change: the Next Steps*, on its proposals for how the limited

company would be structured and run.

We challenged several proposals over lack of clarity, openness, accountability of the board to members and, indeed, who the members were to be.

The NPC had promised to revise its proposals from an analysis of all the responses from union and regional affiliates, local groups and individual members before a meeting on dissolution was to be held. But that never happened – time ran out as the NPC faced insolvency in 2026.

Reasons given were that union mergers had reduced affiliation membership so fees had been lost, and fundraising had been only mildly successful. The final nail in the coffin was the news that Age UK would no longer be able to donate £35,000 a year – if anything, NPC staff were made redundant at the end of January.

While the vote for dissolution may have saved the NPC from bankruptcy, the failure to provide any proposals beforehand for the structure and function of the company may have unintended consequences – including further loss of affiliate members.

An AI summary of responses to the consultation produced by an NPC West Midlands member found a strong commitment to the NPC's campaigning role and survival but concerns about democracy, accountability and affiliate representation being weakened.

Its successes include helping secure the introduction of the free bus pass, the winter fuel allowance and reduced VAT on fuel



# Papers, paywalls and police: good news at last

Government support for local media among key developments, says **Raymond Snoddy**

**I**t's not often that the news about local media, and local newspapers in particular, is good.

In recent years, the outlook for local papers has appeared depressingly bleak. In the past 20 years, nearly 300 have closed – 22 in the past four years.

And that is not the whole story. Among the survivors, costs have been ruthlessly cut, thousands of jobs lost and newsrooms hollowed out.

As culture secretary Lisa Nandy noted at the Society of Editors' (SoE) annual conference in March, there are now news deserts across the country where millions of people have no dedicated local news provider of any kind.

Nandy had, perhaps unsurprisingly, warm words for the importance of local media as a key part of the civic realm – a contributor that had been neglected for far too long.

Yes indeed, but words come cheap and, year after year, politicians turn up at such conferences pledging undying devotion to freedom of the press but then go away again without doing anything before repeating similar platitudes next time.

This time Nandy came bearing gifts, including the creation of a £12 million fund spread over two years to which local newspapers and media organisations can apply for grants.

While some of the money will be to help with financial survival, most will be focused on funding digital transition and transformation and finding new ways of reaching audiences. There will be more support for community radio and greater opportunities for young

people to pursue careers in local media – the traditional first step on the media career ladder that has dried up in recent years.

Cynics will argue it is too little too late and that it will barely nibble at the edge of an enormous problem.

But at least it's a start and let's see how it works out. We must also take the culture secretary at her word when she promises that this is only a beginning.

"The strategy we publish today is the start – not the end point – and we recognise there is more to do," Nandy said at the SoE conference. Her feet should be held to the fire on that – in particular, the government has in future to be much tougher on the tech billionaires. It's not just action to protect young people from the addictive nature of smartphone algorithms, important although it is.

Much larger sums than £12 million over two years must be extracted from the social media platforms, their profits and their owners to help fund local media.

After all, they have been responsible more than anyone else for the creation of local news deserts – which, as Nandy acknowledged, have undermined both social cohesion and local democracy.

By a coincidence of timing, there was further good news for the media, including local news organisations, at the SoE conference, this time good news of their own making.

A comprehensive agreement was announced between journalists and the police, including a detailed charter governing their future relationship.

Year after year at the SoE conferences, there had been sessions complaining about the 'broken' relationship between the two sides, which made reporting crime and the court system very difficult.

This dates back to the Leveson inquiry. Normal journalist-police relations came virtually to an end. Police had to report back on any contact with journalists – as when dealing with criminals. Police press officers thought they didn't need the media any more and dumped information online.

Matters came to a head in 2023 over the disappearance of Nicola Bulley. Local police provided little information and the vacuum was filled by wild internet conspiracy theories.

Everyone agreed that something had to be done. No fewer than 24 recommendations were drawn up by crime reporters and all have been accepted by the College of Policing and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Background briefings are back for accredited journalists where possible on major stories and officers of any rank can speak to the media.

The new charter says all forces should be prepared to respond to journalists' enquiries and emailed press releases should go to journalists rather than simply being issued online. Mugshots will be provided of those who receive custodial sentences.

We'll see how it works in practice, but senior officers see the charter as a major resetting of relations with the media and certainly it's progress on an important source of local stories.

There was even good financial news about the impact of paywalls, delivered when Times editor Tony Gallagher was made a fellow of the SoE.

Gallagher, who also edited The Sun and the Daily Telegraph, revealed that, by the end of last year, The Times had 659,000 digital subscribers – a rise of 7 per cent on the previous year.

It was enough on its own to fund the 700-strong news rooms of The Times and The Sunday Times.



**Police provided little information and the vacuum was filled by wild conspiracy theories. Everyone agreed something had to be done**

---

# When it's worl

## Travel writers fear taxes on hospitality could surpass earnings. **Eugene Costello** reports

**F**or decades, the mechanics of travel journalism have rested on an unspoken understanding. Writers travel in order to report; destinations, tourist boards and hotels provide access so that journalists can see, assess and write. The resulting articles inform readers, shape travel choices and, at their best, hold the industry to account.

That compact is now under strain.

A growing number of freelance travel journalists say anxiety is spreading amid warnings that HMRC is scrutinising non-cash benefits more closely, including flights, accommodation and hospitality received in the course of work. What has unsettled writers is not changes to tax law but that existing regulations could be applied more aggressively to a profession already operating on precarious margins.

Content creation has become a lucrative industry that HMRC and other regulators are justified in examining more closely. The concern is that, in attempting to clamp down on those pursuing freebies under the guise of work, a swingeing axe could turn out to be a blunt instrument that also penalises legitimate travel journalists and responsible micro-influencers.

### Stricter approach

Accountant Mahmood Reza, founder of consultancy I Hate Numbers, says the anxiety circulating among travel writers is not the result of new tax rules but of HMRC applying long-standing principles more assertively to a rapidly expanding content economy.

"In HMRC's view, income is not limited to cash payments: where freelancers receive flights, accommodation or hospitality in exchange for their work, those benefits may still carry a taxable value," says Reza. The distinction between a 'work trip' and a 'jolly' is often less important in law than whether something of measurable monetary worth was received as consideration for professional activity, he says.

Reza notes that freelancers are particularly exposed as they lack the buffer of an employer and because HMRC's increasingly sophisticated data matching, including social media visibility, now makes undeclared benefits easier to identify. His advice is pragmatic rather than alarmist: keep clear records, declare where required, offset legitimate expenses and do not assume professional intent alone provides protection.

Reza especially highlights the issue of writers and creators bringing family or friends on trips. "That is very likely to be a taxable benefit under the 'money's worth' principle," he says, "but, as with all areas of tax, there are exemptions and individual circumstances must be considered."

Tim Dawson, the NUJ's freelance organiser, says HMRC has

made no secret of examining benefits received by self-employed taxpayers more closely.

"Some of this focus is on benefits in kind," he says. "For the vast majority of freelancers, this will only become an issue if HMRC believes there is reason to investigate their accounts. For any journalist provided with valuable services for the purpose of review, it is wise to retain as much evidence as possible to demonstrate that what they received was necessary to carry out their work rather than a gift. The NUJ will, of course, defend members who find themselves being taxed on the value of products they have legitimately received for review."

HMRC told The Journalist that the tax treatment of travel and hospitality depends on individual circumstances rather than blanket rules. In a written response, it said benefits received 'by reason of employment' or self-employment are assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account whether what was provided was necessary for a person to do their job.

For employees, HMRC notes that benefit-in-kind rules can apply to third-party benefits, but that exemptions exist where the benefit would have been tax deductible as a necessary work expense, as well as for small gifts and certain forms of third-party entertainment. For the self-employed, HMRC says the tax treatment of travel and hospitality depends on the facts of each case, adding that guidance is available to help individuals understand their obligations when receiving gifts or non-cash benefits.

While HMRC emphasises proportionality and exemptions, many freelance writers say the lack of clear, sector-specific guidance leaves them feeling exposed in a profession already operating on tight margins.

### When the sums don't add up

For many travel journalists, the fear is not theoretical. It is mathematical.

Antonia Windsor, who has written extensively for the Telegraph, the Guardian, the Observer and the Financial Times in her 20-year-plus career, argues that treating hosted travel as taxable 'money's worth' on anything like its notional market value would be catastrophic for freelance travel writers because the value of complimentary trips routinely dwarfs the tiny fees paid for the work. Tax liabilities could exceed income.

She says the problem is most exposed when journalists travel with companions. Family and accessibility reporting can make a partner or child genuinely relevant, but HMRC can still challenge why a writer 'needs' them rather than interviewing other guests, turning a legitimate commission into an unpayable bill.

Windsor situates this tax anxiety inside a wider collapse of the profession. Rates have effectively fallen to a fraction of their 1990s level, expenses are routinely refused even on labour-intensive assignments and payment delays are common, pushing many writers below minimum wage.

At the same time, she says, travel journalists feel compelled to produce unpaid social media output to stay visible to editors

**Where freelancers receive flights or accommodation in exchange for work, those may carry a taxable value**

# k, not a perk

and PRs while influencers charge for this. The consequence is a growing drift from journalism towards marketing, with PRs increasingly demanding guaranteed coverage and greater control over copy, eroding editorial independence.

Windsor says many travel writers cannot make the economics work and are being forced into other roles or out of the sector.

Mary Novakovich is a veteran travel journalist who has been producing travel articles since 1999 when she filed her first feature for *The Independent on Sunday*. She says the debate around tax and hosted travel cannot be separated from the long-term collapse in freelance rates.

"I was being paid around 20p a word in the late 1990s and that rate hasn't really changed," she says. "What has changed is the word count, which has steadily dropped."

In real terms, she argues, travel journalism has suffered one of the steepest pay declines in the media, with workloads increasing as fees stagnate. Against that backdrop, she believes attempts to apply benefit-in-kind taxation to hosted trips risk pushing an already fragile profession further toward collapse.

## An enabler, not a gift

Annie Bennett, who has been writing about Spain since the 1990s for *The Telegraph* and other national titles, agrees. She rejects the idea that complimentary travel constitutes a gift, arguing that it is provided by tourist boards to enable commissioned journalism.

"I may be a travel writer, but I can't remember the last time I had a holiday," she says. She rarely attends group press trips now, which she finds financially unviable, preferring targeted research trips which she often part funds herself.

Hugh Collins of Julia Spence PR argues that the crisis in travel journalism can be solved.

Freelance writers, he says, are being priced out of the profession by stagnant fees and unreimbursed costs, narrowing the pool to those who live near airports or can afford to subsidise their work. Julia Spence PR's Inntravel media support

scheme is designed to counter this by covering basic expenses such as airport transport and meals.

These costs, Collins says, are modest but materially affect a writer's net income. Supporting journalists is not virtue signalling but ecosystem maintenance. With no professional writers, travel coverage degrades into marketing, damaging credibility for destinations and brands alike.

From a commercial perspective, he argues, widening the pool of experienced journalists improves outcomes for everyone. Quality coverage depends on writers who can afford to do the job properly.

Travel journalist and influencer Fran Bridgewater notes that most travel writers earn modest annual incomes while the notional value of hosted trips can easily exceed their total earnings. Without clearer thresholds or proportional treatment, she warns, writers may increasingly be forced to decline work simply because they cannot afford to accept it.

Former BBC staffer and now cultural content creator Catherine Boardman, who runs *Cultural Wednesdays*, says regulators are becoming far more alert to disclosure and transparency across all forms of content creation.

She argues that while genuinely work-related press trips should not be taxable, experiences that amount to free holidays, particularly where companions are included, may create benefits in kind that must be declared. Crucially, she says, this scrutiny should not apply only to influencers.

## What is at stake

Travel journalism remains popular with readers and influential within the industry, yet its economic foundations have steadily eroded.

If tax enforcement is applied without nuance, writers warn, the result may not be greater fairness but further consolidation, with only those able to subsidise their work continuing in the field.

The danger, many argue, is that in attempting to regulate a fast-growing creator economy, policymakers may undermine one of the few remaining areas of specialist journalism that still relies on first-hand reporting.



# DRUGS, GUN AND GUERRILLA

**Jeff Farrell** on his action-packed freelance life reporting in Venezuela

**T**he prison cop sat on a chair in the passage, his eyes rising up from the floor to the gringo approaching him – me. “Maxima wing,” I said. He stood up slowly, not bothering to answer, and took a truncheon from his holster. He rapped it three times against a steel door. A hatch in the door slid back and two eyes peeped out. A bolt slid. The door eased open slowly. In front of me stood a teenager, no older than 18 or 19, dressed in white tracksuit bottoms.

My eyes dropped to the long metal object dangling from his hand. It was a shotgun. Why was this guard not in uniform? “Visita,” I said. “Paul Keany.”

The gun-toting teenager stood aside. I stepped past him into a hallway in the Maxima wing in Los Teques prison outside Caracas. A tall, lean guy wearing jeans walked up to me. “A quien buscas?” (“Who are you looking for?”) he asked.

My eyes dropped down to his hand, which was casually holding a black revolver. The penny dropped – he wasn’t a prison guard but an armed inmate. My eyes rose back up to his face. ‘Paul Keany,’ I said. He nodded and walked off.

After months of trying to get into Los Teques jail to interview a cocaine smuggler of Irish-British nationality, I was finally getting to talk to him. In the meantime, I watched the inmate with the shotgun dance salsa next to a Christmas tree with twinkling lights, the shotgun dangling as he twirled the chica.

I shook my head at how bizarre it all was.

Paul Keany stepped into the passage. I handed him a couple of bags of food I had brought. We spoke for only about 10 minutes.

Through round-rimmed glasses, he gave me a questioning look that said, ‘Who are you?’ I told him I was a journalist, and that Father Patrick, a Caracas-based Irish priest who visited him, had told me how to get into the jail to talk to him and hear his story. I left out the word ‘interview’ so he wouldn’t run off. “Father Pat!” Keany said, smiling now.

Keany told me he had been caught at the airport in Caracas trying to smuggle six kilos of cocaine back to Ireland. He was in the early months of an eight-year sentence.

I eyed up the guy with the shotgun still dancing. My gaze wandered to another man with a revolver. A few days earlier, I’d

been robbed at gunpoint. This place was the last thing I needed.

I got enough material from Keany for a short radio report for Irish national broadcaster RTÉ. No story for a paper because he wouldn’t let me use his name. The three-minute audio piece went out at about 8am on a Saturday. No editors beat their way to my door for more stories. No fanfare. Nothing. And no book – and Keany’s story had the makings of one.

After a year and a half in Venezuela, I’d already had my byline in lights in the international media. I’d travelled to Caracas in early 2008 to be a foreign correspondent. I’d quit my job as a subeditor with a national paper in Ireland; I was offered a fat redundancy, and this was my ticket to get out into the world and write about it. I thought about where to go.

Wars raged in the Middle East but I thought it’d be tough to operate there as a freelance. Venezuela was in the news as the then president Hugo Chavez shook up the country in his bid for a socialist utopia that ultimately failed.

He died of cancer in 2013, leaving the reins of ‘socialism’ in the hands of Nicolas Maduro. Some eight million people fled the country from 2014 as the economy collapsed. He then stole elections in 2024 – giving the US an excuse to swoop in. All this came after my time reporting in Venezuela.

What was making the international news in 2008 was largely Chavez’s wild outbursts, from blasting George Bush as ‘the devil’ in a UN speech to hare-brained comments that assassin and terrorist Carlos the Jackal, a Venezuelan, was not a ‘bad guy’ but a ‘revolutionary fighter’.

Venezuela seemed like a good option. I scanned bylines and reached out to an Irish correspondent there with a UK paper and learned few freelancers were there. As for Spanish, I could learn it easily enough. Wrong. I signed up with classes in Merida in the Andes; I figured out the grammar but could understand little on the street and speak only basic phrases. But I didn’t let this hold me back. Once my command of the lingo went beyond ‘dos cervezas’, I hit the road in Venezuela.

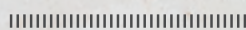
I started my hunt for stories by tapping into the network of Irish priests. One invited me to stay with him in his fancy residence in the mountainous area outside San Cristobal in Tachira state that bordered Colombia.

The priest and his flock were a gold mine. The padre gave me a strong angle about FARC rebels who’d flooded into the area after a supposed nod from Venezuela’s lefty leader Chavez.

The Irish priest said the guerillas rang him up once to

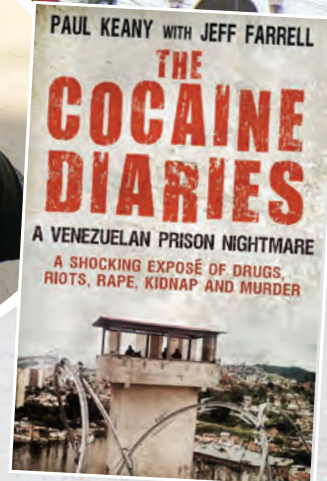
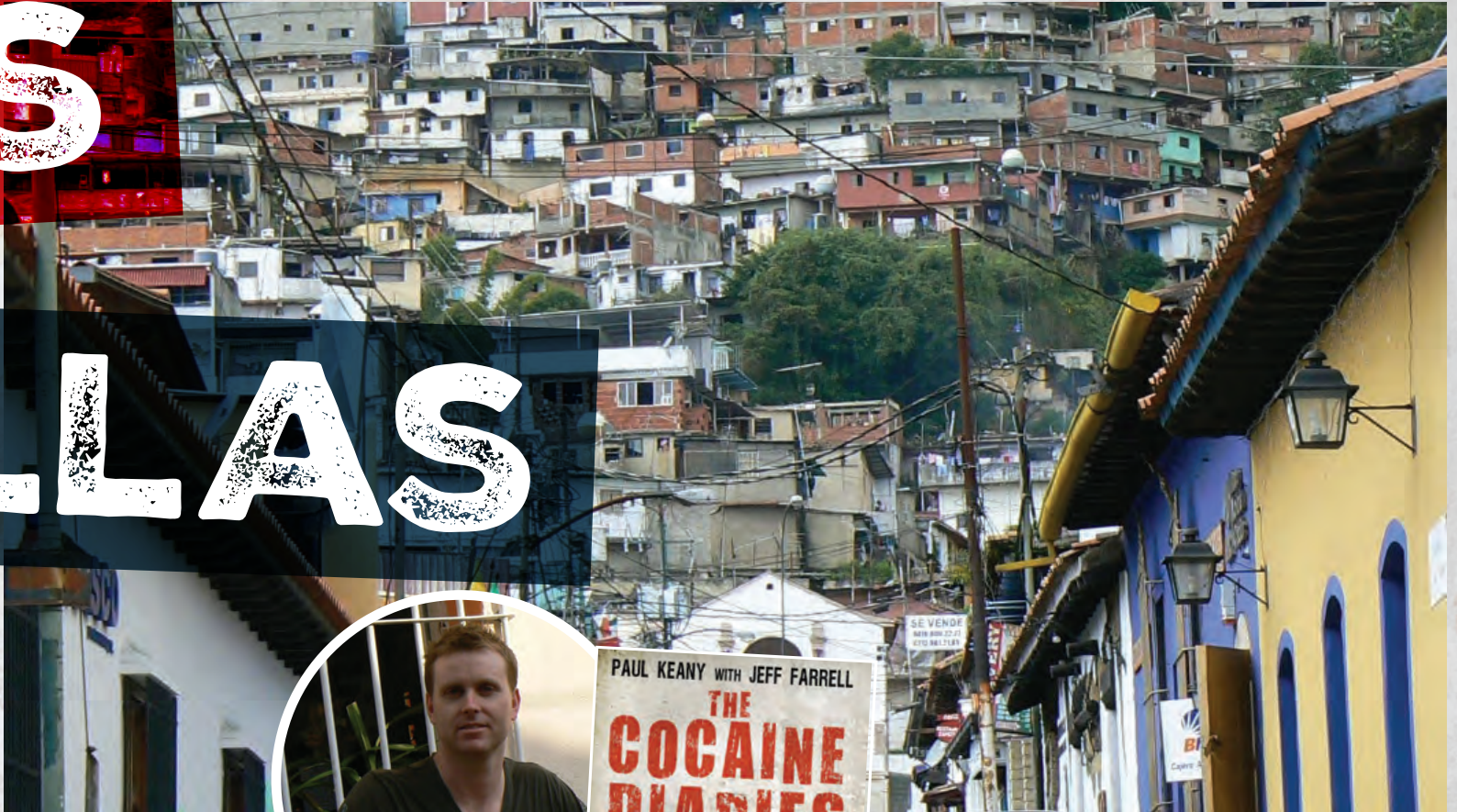


**I knew I had a solid international story on the lines of ‘FARC guerillas run wild in Venezuela thanks to Chavez’**



JEFF FARRELL

# S LLAS



extort money. He ignored them. A woman in his flock told me the FARC had kidnapped her daughter and released her for cash. I later interviewed a local politician who backed up the claims the FARC were running crimes in the area — including extortion of hot dog vendors.

I knew I had a solid international story on the lines of ‘FARC guerillas run wild in Venezuela thanks to Chavez’. I pitched the story to a US international paper who ran it big on their paper and website with my byline. I’d made it. I’d achieved my goal to be an international correspondent.

I continued on my travels, hoovering up stories for US papers from protests over soaring crime to elections in Chavez’s home state of Barinas before settling into Caracas for a few months.

There, I chased stories including a visit to a *barrio* — a ghetto. Back then, some 40–50 people were gunned down on an average weekend night in the *barrios*, with homicides topping more than 20,000 a year across the country. A Spanish priest led me around, saying if I went alone I faced trouble but the criminals respected the cloth and I was safe with him.

One family told me their son was shot on the street by criminals for no good reason. Worse, they filmed it and were flogging the video in a CD format to locals who rented it out along with copies of pirated movies. I wanted to puke.

I got held up at gunpoint while out for a mountain hike up the El Avila mountain. The gunman pushed the barrel to my temple and I handed over what I had — an iPod. I felt no fear and it all played out in slow motion. He was happy with his booty and didn’t shoot me. I survived but, a few days later, I realised he could have killed me. It was time to go.

But not home. I travelled across Latin America as a kind of backpacker reporter for a couple of years. In Bolivia, I

reported on how the special forces shot dead a young Irishman over his alleged part in a supposed bomb plot to kill the then president, Evo Morales. In Argentina, I reported on the Dirty War trials over the anti-junta dissidents who were disappeared — with some thrown alive out of planes. In Colombia, I reported on presidential elections. And so on.

After three years, I was burnt out and decided to go home for good. I booked a flight to Dublin in Christmas 2010.

In Dublin airport in the immigration queue, I heard a guy telling officials he was travelling with an emergency passport because his original one had been stolen in Colombia.

This seemed a suspect story — a tale an inmate on the run from Venezuela might use. I raced after him to the carousel where he stood with another Irish drug mule from Los Teques.

“How ya doing?” I said. “We met in Venezuela.” He studied me for a moment. “You came in to see me in Los Teques.” He smiled. “The reporter.” I then did the maths in my head. I had last seen him two years ago and he had had at least another seven years of his sentence left then. “We did a runner,” he said, “got out on parole and bussed it to Colombia.”

“Me and you are going to write a book on your story,” I said. We shook hands. We published the true crime memoir, *The Cocaine Diaries: a Venezuelan Prison Nightmare*, with a Random Penguin House imprint. It sold over 80,000 copies and was dramatised by National Geographic in a TV series.

Neither Keany or I made a bean out of the book despite huge sales. Publishers have the idea that authors should be happy enough their book is published. That burned, but I look back fondly at my travels in Venezuela. And many journalists start out with a dream to write a book someday. Few do. I did.

**Jeff Farrell is self-publishing his novel *Last Call in Caracas*, due out in April 29. It features a fictional US attack on Venezuela — which he never expected to happen**

**One family told me their son was shot on the street by criminals, who filmed it and were flogging the video**

# Rise of the fake experts

A search for a psychologist led to a world of fake experts, reports **Stephanie Power**

**B**arbara Santini seems very busy. She's a psychologist with a degree from the University of Oxford who advises on sex for a website called Peaches and Screams.

According to the website, she has been quoted in Vogue, Cosmopolitan, Metro, Hello Magazine, The Express, The Telegraph, The Mail, Woman and Home and others. When not giving quotes to journalists, she can apparently be found searching for treasures at Brick Lane market or renovating her Victorian house – she recently stumbled upon a hidden cellar at home. You'd have thought her surveyor might have found that earlier but, from the website, you get the impression that this is just SO Barbara.

Rob Waugh is a freelance technology journalist. He 'met' Santini while working on a story about identity theft.

"I'd spotted Barbara while looking at a website some journalists use to find experts for quotes called Response Source. She was supposedly an Oxford-educated psychologist."

When Waugh tried to find her online, there was no trace of a website or a way to actually speak to her other than through the Peaches and Screams sex toy website.

If he was doubtful about Santini's authenticity, her speed in replying put the tin lid on it: "Real psychologists don't respond to people two minutes after a request with 12 carefully crafted paragraphs of copy."

Looking for traces of Santini led Waugh to a host of fake people often giving artificial intelligence-generated answers to journalists requesting expert comment.

Take Fiona Jenkins. She has featured 170 times in the UK press, giving gardening advice. Waugh says: "If she were a real person, she would be far more prolific than any other gardener in the media. She's putting out quotes for websites called Find Your Job and Price Your Job. And the people behind Fiona Jenkins are targeting publications that are just looking for viral headlines at any cost and who don't really check whether the people are real."

Why is this happening?

Waugh says that, at first look, it appears PR companies are working to push quotes from organisations. But, he says,

they're not really PR companies – they are unscrupulous search engine optimisation people, using PR techniques to get links for their companies into publications.

The reason that's appealing to the companies getting the coverage? It pushes them to the top of Google searches.

As part of an interaction with Santini or maybe Jenkins, they will ask for a company mention or a link to their site. Newspaper websites have a high domain rating so getting your company website on there can be valuable.

Waugh has been working with Press Gazette and NeoMam Studios, a creative content marketing agency that advocates for a human-centric approach to digital marketing. In one week in January alone, they found around 50 fake experts strutting their electronic stuff in the British media. And they uncovered more than 1,000 articles featuring people who are figments of someone's imagination.





### Ways to spot fake experts by Alex Cassidy

#### Suspicious or missing photos

No picture at all or only a single, overly polished headshot that may be AI generated.



#### Reluctance to speak directly

The expert is never available for a call, with the PR acting as a barrier between journalist and source.

#### Vague or inflated job titles

Encouragement to use broad labels such as 'spokesperson' or 'topic expert' instead of specific, verifiable roles.

#### No credible online footprint

Legitimate experts should be cross-referenceable and be listed on a company site and LinkedIn or other social profiles showing both professional and personal substance.

#### Templated, AI-style quotes

Quotes may contain familiar AI-style phrasing and rely on rhetorical patterns such as negative parallelisms (it's not just X, it's Y).

including those working in PR and comms, sign up to the union's code of conduct to adhere to ethical standards. This includes 'striving to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair.'

"However, this investigation shows there are plenty of anonymous bad actors out there who have little regard for observing ethical standards. This investigation highlights the dangers AI technology presents in spreading fake news and contributing to declining public trust in journalism.

"The NUJ will continue to campaign for urgent regulatory oversight of AI and stands ready to work collaboratively with other organisations, including the CIPR and PRCA, to find solutions that protect our members and sectors."

Waugh says services such as Response Source, Quoted and HARO (Help A Reporter Out) are trying to clean up their acts by targeting people who are doing this. But perhaps the solution is in the hands of the newspapers?

Press Gazette published a dossier of more than 500 stories appearing in major news brands based on press releases sent from MyJobQuote featuring fake and misleading comments, then created a league table of the hardest hit news bodies.

Publications that featured the quotes included Reach (which produces The Mirror, The Express, Daily Record, Manchester Evening News and the Liverpool Echo), Future (Woman and Home, Ideal Home, Homes and Gardens), News UK (The Sun) and Newsquest (regional papers including The Northern Echo and The Bradford Telegraph and Argus). I put interview requests in for all four companies. Only Reach replied.

Chief content officer David Higgerson said: "The rise of fake experts is not good for anyone – media, PR or the public. We've made several changes which have driven this down but we're determined to do more, especially as the tactics used become more sophisticated.

"What makes this even more complicated is that we have recently seen previously trusted and very well established PR agencies sharing fake quotes. We have created our own directory of trusted PR agencies and won't hesitate to remove agencies and PRs as well as add them. We are considering more severe steps for agencies who haven't shown us they are taking enough steps on their side – including wholesale blocking of emails from those domains. All of this is on top of working with our journalists to make sure they interrogate even the most convincing-looking releases. We appreciate this is a cross-industry issue that we can all support each other on."

Many stories appear low stake. You'll have seen lots of these types of clickbait headlines: 'There's a right place to put your wheelie bins – getting it wrong is a real security risk', 'Simple fence trick that will make your garden look much bigger' and 'The grim reason you should never leave your towel on the floor'.

Waugh and Cassidy have looked at some of this advice and discovered it to be completely wrong.

Cassidy says that targeting the lifestyle end of journalism does not make stories benign. "We've seen examples of AI hallucinations producing dangerous misinformation, from deadly 'recipes' involving bleach to absurd suggestions such as glue sandwiches. Whether AI generated or not, fabricated advice in low-stakes verticals is the thin end of a much wider wedge."

A few clarifying questions often expose whether the authority is real or not. If there are photos of your spokesperson, have a good look. I'm not saying nutritionist Kristy Thomas (pictured left) doesn't exist. She looks very friendly. But that's an awfully big banana.

Each character feels more jaw-droppingly absurd than the last. As well as Santini, there was Anne Simmons. In a print feature in The Times, she spoke about her role as a cleaner at Buckingham Palace, including how they had prepared for Donald Trump's state visit. Plates Express and Pure Window Cleaning got a mention as part of her top tips for a sparkling home. It seems Simmons didn't exist either or, if she did, she had never worked at any royal palace. The Times and other publications took these features down.

How are they getting there in the first place?

Alex Cassidy, managing director at NeoMam, says: "Unfortunately, the UK press remains too easily exploitable. When journalists are forced to source comment under unrealistic deadlines, they are actively disincentivised from checking whether a quoted expert is real. And in that vacuum, the fastest PR wins, not necessarily the most credible."

Waugh agrees: "It's the culture of doing 10 stories a day. The back bench will just throw stories at the junior reporters so people don't feel connected to the material they're working on. If you say to the back bench 'this looks dodgy', you're not going to get rewarded for that. You're just going to get told off."

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) have written a joint letter to journalism membership bodies and media trade titles following concerns about PR professionals pitching stories using fake experts. They're asking journalists to use their public membership registers to verify the credentials of PRs and expert sources where concerns arise – but that only works if the PR is a member of one of these associations.

Laura Davison, NUJ general secretary, says that all members,

# A battle is won, but not the war

Plans to give AI firms free rein on creative works have been halted, but we still need safeguards, says **Andrew Wiard**

**J**ournalists and other creators have scored a major victory over Big Tech. In its Report on Copyright and Artificial Intelligence issued in March, the government announced that it would not be pursuing its text data and mining exception to copyright law. This would have declared open season on using our work for artificial intelligence (AI) training unless we somehow ‘opted out’.

The proposal was an attack on our rights as copyright creators, to refuse permission, or demand payment for the use of our work. Not only was this wrong in principle but also, for most of us, opting out would have been impossible and unworkable.

Faced with spirited defiance from the ‘creators’ champion’, film-maker Baroness Kidron in the Lords, the Creators’ Rights Alliance (which includes the NUJ), Paul McCartney, Elton John and people from the world of arts and entertainment in general, the government caved in.

Just to illustrate the danger of what might happen without organised resistance, on the next day the European Parliament proposed compulsory licensing of copyright material for AI use. Not even an option to opt out.

That is press ganging creators into supplying Big Tech and Silicon Valley whether we like it or not. But that won’t happen over here as long as Baroness Kidron is still leading the charge.

So, the battle is won for now – but not the war. They’ve told us what they won’t do but not what they will. They have only said they will not ‘take forward’ their preferred text data and

mining exception, not that they won’t consider alternatives, or even return to it.

Crucially, we cannot possibly defend our rights without transparency. That’s the word used to describe whatever procedure can be agreed for making AI companies declare what they have scraped off the internet or otherwise taken for AI training. We want transparency; they don’t. It requires judgment, decision and legislation. Instead, nothing – the government has just kicked that can down the road.

Without transparency, licensing will be extremely difficult if not impossible, whether directly or through collective licensing. Collecting schemes run by ALCS and DACS would be the simplest solution for NUJ members who choose to opt in.

I myself will not be licensing my pictures for generative AI to create fake news.

Speaking of which, the government is taking this seriously, through the use of ‘labelling’ for ‘input transparency’, identifying work generated by AI – something along the lines of the EU’s Artificial Intelligence Act which should come into force later this year. Though here, again, they do not propose any specific action. The alternative (or rather complementary) approach is to label authenticity, guaranteeing provenance.

Photographers have already been planning this through the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA) with a clickable CR

(Content Credentials) icon/pin in photographs revealing their origins. In January, the Society of Authors launched the latest authentication scheme, using a Human Authored logo ‘to help identify works written by humans in a market increasingly flooded by AI-generated books’. We don’t need to wait for legislation to deal with all this (although that could help). We can simply do it ourselves.

Legislation will be essential, however, for the most radical idea to come out of this report – controlling ‘digital replicas’ of someone’s voice or face. Problems range from all too credible impersonation of public figures making misleading, outrageous or downright dangerous statements on social media to exploiting the likeness of actors for commercial gain.

Last December, actors’ union Equity held an indicative strike ballot producing an overwhelming majority for refusing digital scanning on set. Their work, voices and likeness are being used without their explicit consent. Quite simply, that should be outlawed. But there’s nothing simple about that.

But time is running out to safeguard the intellectual property rights of creators, and to hold Big Tech to account. We are facing theft for AI on an industrial scale. The government should not, in the name of innovation, be attempting to ‘balance’ the rights of AI thieves and creators. It’s time for the government to get off the fence. It’s time for it to act – now.

**“**  
**The government should not be trying to ‘balance’ the rights of AI thieves and creators**



**Denis MacShane** asks if the paper will shift in attitude, including towards Europe

# Where now for the Telegraph?

**T**he takeover of The Daily Telegraph by the German media giant Axel Springer is the most important

foreign change in the ownership of the British press since Rupert Murdoch bought The Sun and The Sunday Times and turned both into cheerleaders for a Thatcherite world view.

The Daily Telegraph under the editorship of Sir Max Hastings in the 1990s handed editorial comment on Europe over to Boris Johnson, a fluent writer but indifferent to facts as he portrayed the European Union as a monstrous federal super-state whose prime purpose was to crush Britain.

The Telegraph, however, is not just any old national broadsheet. It was, for more than a century, the bible of the Conservative-voting half.

Under different owners and editors, the paper had a rough-and-ready rule of professional, well-researched news reporting that met the traditional deontological obligations of quality journalism based on factual accuracy, giving both or more sides in a story and avoiding the lurid sensationalism and contempt for truth of tabloids such as the Daily Mail or The Sun.

When I worked as a journalist in the 1970s for the BBC Radio 4 news bulletins or the BBC World Service, The Daily Telegraph was the paper that most BBC journalists turned to first – not for its opinions but because its news reporting could be trusted.

However, when the Citizen Kane figure of Canadian newspaper proprietor Conrad Black bought The Daily Telegraph, his strongly held right-wing views in support of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan started to permeate it.

Then two brothers living in tax exile

in the Channel Islands bought the paper. They had made their fortune in financial speculation and objected to the EU's timid efforts to bring transparency and some sense of responsibility to the capitalism unleashed in the 1980s as the communist world collapsed in on itself and most centre-left or liberal parties just joined in the generalised worship of the free market.

The Telegraph's new owners had a profound dislike of the European Union as a supra-national regulatory body and mocked its meek efforts to promote social partnership.

Now the Daily Telegraph has been bought by pan-European publishing empire Axel Springer. The new boss, Mathias Döpfner, is fluent in English and was a close friend of the late George Weidenfeld, the Austrian emigré publisher who promoted cooperation and contacts between London, Paris and Berlin.

**//**  
**The publisher's principles include support for a united Europe and the social market economy (in which unions are partners) and opposition to political extremism**

Springer publishes both a Sun-type tabloid, Bild, and the worthy, balanced daily Die Welt. The publisher has a list of principles – support for the transatlantic alliance, the state of Israel, a united Europe and the social market economy (in which unions are seen as partners not enemies) and opposition to political extremism.

In Britain, political extremism has been actualised this century with the drive by The Daily Telegraph, the Murdoch papers, the Daily Mail and the Europhobe Tories, who all promoted Britain leaving the EU.

Daily Telegraph editors are unhappy if there is not a story every day sneering at Europe. But Britain since Brexit has slipped to 15th in rank among European nations in terms of GDP per capita and Labour walks in fear of pointing out how Brexit is impoverishing Britain.

Polls all show a majority of British people think their 2016 populist plebiscite vote was an error. But no one in government or in the Tory-Reform opposition dare admit this truth.

So the question is: will the new owners of the Daily Telegraph allow it to run comment and news stories that are propaganda for Brexit isolationism or will it start reporting about the damage the Brexit experiment has done to Britain and the need for Britain to once again be a leading nation in Europe – in line with the decades-long principles of its new owners and publishers?

**Denis MacShane is a former UK minister for Europe and a former president of the NUJ**



TELEGRAPH MEDIA GROUP

you're

goodtogo



# Travel Insurance

Cover for medical conditions  
and no age limits

- ✓ 24 /7 medical emergency assistance
- ✓ Experts in cover for medical conditions
- ✓ Cover for cruise holidays



Special Offer  
**20% OFF\***  
Base Premium  
Save on single-trip and annual cover  
Quote:  
**SUNSHINE20**

Call us FREE for  
an instant quote

**0808 175 3912**

Or visit us at

**goodtogoinsurance.com**

Authorised & Regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority - No. 471641. Terms and conditions apply. 5-star Defaqto rating applies to Platinum policies and Premium Cruise single trip policies only. \*Discount applies to base premium only. Discount valid until 31/08/2026.

# Quilter Invest



## Money Needs a Plan

For busy journalists building your own investment portfolio can be time consuming. At Quilter Invest we have ready-made portfolios managed by experts just for you.

Use code **NEWYEAR26**

Download the app today and get 40% off our platform fees

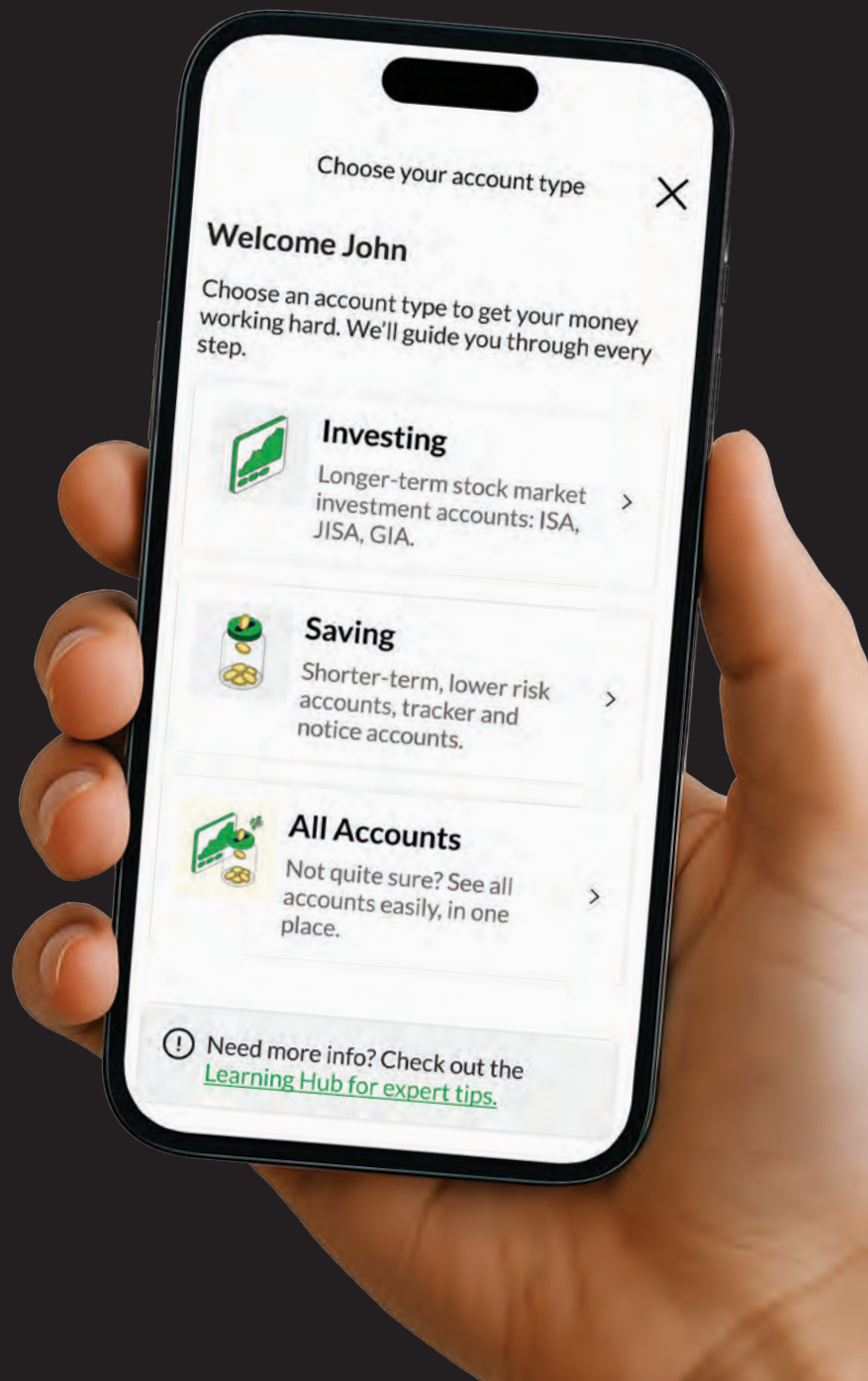


★ Trustpilot



503 reviews

When investing your capital is at risk. Quilter Invest Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of Quilter plc.



# Hell of the laundries

Journalists tell **Ruth Addicott** about covering the Magdalene Laundries scandal

**I**t was the late 1990s when Irish journalist Lynne Kelleher first reported on the Magdalene Laundries. The suffering of more than 10,000 women and girls in the Catholic-run laundries between 1922 and 1996 is one of the most harrowing stories in Irish history, leading to a long campaign and fight for justice and a state apology in 2013.

Kelleher was a young reporter on the Irish Sunday Mirror when she received a call from survivor Mary Norris, asking if she would accompany her to the convent in Cork where she had been held. The convent had closed and the land sold but the 'long dark corridors' remained.

"I walked in with her and she was shaking," recalls Kelleher.

"Mary described a horrific situation. Some of the women had their hair cut short, even shaved. They were given men's names, they were completely de-feminised. She said she would never forget the cries of the mothers who had their babies taken away; it used to haunt her."

One of the most harrowing parts for Norris was the women who were never granted a proper burial and, the following day, she asked Kelleher if she would accompany her back again.

"Mary was determined to find the grave and suddenly she remembered it being on the other side of a wall," recalls Kelleher. "I hopped up on the wall and I was walking around the field and I came across this stone. It said something like 'Here lie the graves of the Magdalene women'. It was a mass grave."

The story prompted a huge response and ran in the UK as well as Ireland. Kelleher has been covering the case for years, but that day with Mary Norris has never left her.

Patsy McGarry was religious affairs correspondent of The Irish Times (1997–2023) and says it was a challenge making sure he didn't get overwhelmed or desensitised by the stories.

"At times, restraint was a trial when dealing with representatives of the four religious congregations which ran the laundries and who have refused to contribute to a statutory compensation scheme for the surviving women. Sticking to the facts and reporting their positions fairly and accurately was probably the greatest difficulty of all."

The moment that stands out for McGarry was in October 2002 when he attended a preview of Peter Mullan's film *The Magdalene Sisters* in Dublin and arranged for Norris and fellow survivor Sarah Williams to accompany him. They were re-traumatised and it is something he regrets to this day.

In 2005 while at college, filmmaker Steven O'Riordan watched *The Magdalene Sisters*. O'Riordan, then 22, had never heard of the Magdalene Laundries. It changed his life.

"When the names came up at the end of all the women who

## Get personal and keep pushing

Sophie Warburton, features writer at The Sun, interviewed survivor Gabrielle O'Gorman in November 2025. Warburton says journalists should not be afraid to ask personal

questions and says answers must be conveyed accurately.

"The worst that can happen is your interviewee says no, they don't want to answer. The point is you're there to

learn and inform your readers of exactly what went on."

### Details in podcasts

Long-form podcasts offer a great platform for telling the

full story, says journalist Lynne Kelleher: "You can do more than with a two-page article - you can really dive into the nuts and bolts.

"Nobody came back for them - they were abandoned. It was such a heartbreaking and senseless waste of lives."

### Don't give up

A major barrier was that requests for interviews from the Church were repeatedly declined. Filmmaker Nuala Cunningham says it's important not to give up: "If you believe in a story, keep pushing."



had got out or died, my initial thought was, where are these women now? Is there anything I can do?," he recalls.

O'Riordan began contacting relatives of survivors online. Between 2006 and 2014, he spoke to 165 survivors. He was once denied access to a convent and escorted off the premises by police; years later, he found out there were women inside who wanted to speak.

The first survivor who made contact was Maureen Sullivan, who became the catalyst for his 2009 film *The Forgotten Maggies*. The documentary follows the lives of Sullivan and three other women and their search for justice. Survivor Kathleen Legg had kept her secret hidden for 69 years.

Determined to get their stories heard, O'Riordan submitted the film to the Galway Film Festival, but it wasn't selected.

"I was so upset. I flew back from the UK and went down to the Galway Film Festival headquarters with one of the cameramen and did a protest," he says.

The festival agreed to show it and the film was launched to critical acclaim, drawing media attention from around the world. It became the first Irish-made documentary on the subject to be shown on TV at the time.

A few weeks later, O'Riordan was at a cinema screening in Waterford. "This woman burst through the door and said, 'I'm a Magdalene survivor – I want to tell my story too,'" he recalls.

The woman was Marina Gambold who went on to become a lead campaigner. Her book *Whispering Hope*, co-written with O'Riordan, became a number one bestseller.

The film led to more women coming forward and the formation of the Magdalene Survivors Together group. Alongside pressure from other groups, such as Justice For Magdalenes, it catapulted into a national campaign.

Realising none of the survivors had met or spoken with senior government officials, O'Riordan wrote to the Department of Justice requesting a meeting. The department agreed, but wanted to keep it out of the media. It was an opportunity he couldn't let go.

"I put out a press release saying 'we were told not to tell you, but we're telling you,'" he says. "Suddenly, a whole load of

"I realised there were women out there trying to tell their stories but nobody was listening,"

**Steven O'Riordan,**  
director, *The Forgotten Maggies*

"The greatest challenge, at the outset particularly, was outright hostility from some entrenched lay Catholic readers and a deep suspicion on the part of the institutional Church itself."

**Patsy McGarry,**  
religious affairs correspondent, *The Irish Times*

"Interviews like these remind me why I'm in the job - to learn, listen and provide a platform for others."

**Sophie Warburton,**  
feature writer, *The Sun*

media turned up and the story propelled forward again."

There were marches across Ireland and a charity single raising money for a monument. Sinead O'Connor, who sang on it, had spent time in a Magdalene Laundry herself.

In 2010, the Irish Human Rights Commission issued a report. In 2011, the United Nations Committee Against Torture called for an independent investigation. In 2013, the McAleese report confirmed extensive state involvement. On February 19 2013, the Irish prime minister (taoiseach) issued a state apology.

O'Riordan stood arm in arm with the survivors as they left parliament and remembers them clasping each others' hands in front of the cameras and waving them up to the sky.

In 2018, survivors were invited to an event in Dublin to receive a public apology and Nuala Cunningham, producer and director of TV and film company New Decade, was asked to film it. She recalls the crowd waiting to greet the 220 women and the cheers as they stepped off the bus. "It was easily one of the most emotional filming experiences I have had," she says.

One thing that struck Cunningham when the women received the invitation was the fear many of them still felt: "Some of them feared it might even be a trap and they were being brought back to Ireland to be locked up again."

Although the survivors had contributed to the McAleese report, Cunningham says many felt as if they had been 'assessed' – they wanted to be not only heard but also believed.

"I think they thought that people still judged them," she says. It inspired Cunningham to make the two-part documentary Ireland's Dirty Laundry, which was shown on RTE in 2022.

Cunningham believes there are still a lot of questions to be answered, particularly around the documentation held by the state, including medical records and polio and vaccine trials. "It's something we're working on," she says.

For O'Riordan, it was a story he stumbled on by chance: "I remember a nun ringing me in 2009, saying I was completely wasting my time and I'd be better off concentrating on something else that would give me more benefit to my life. I always think back to that and think how wrong she was."

# Life as an au

## Faith Eckersall gives point-by-point advice on writing that novel

• **There isn't a heap of money.** In 2022, the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society reported that, since 2006, the median income of full-time authors had fallen by around 60 per cent to a measly £7,000 a year. And remember, folks, that's the median – many get far less. Any advance must be earned out by sales before you get a slice of the financial action and, if you have an agent, they'll get 15 per cent of everything. (And so they should, because these wonderful people, who deal with your publisher and negotiate over foreign rights, AI horribleness and Netflix acquisitions don't earn a penny until you do.) If I had kept a tally of all the hours spent writing and rewriting my novel – I revised my first book more than 18 times – I think the 'pay' would tot up to less than half pence a word.

• **Give up the idea of giving up the day job.** Because: money. But also because you'll need your lovely network when it comes to getting those precious eyeballs on your book and hands reaching for credit cards to pay for it. I overcame my natural reticence to become a serial tapper-upper of almost anyone in newspaper and magazine publishing who I thought might be able to get the book more publicity. As journos, we are also good at thinking of all the different ways we can adapt and recycle our story and it would be a pity to let it all go to waste, ahem...

• **When's it coming out/what's it called/can I see the cover?** Astonishingly, most publishers don't decide these things early on. So you may not be able to tell people the book's title or even what it will look like until, potentially, a few weeks before its release. Remember, too, that your publisher may want to change the title you have lovingly bestowed on it and you'll probably have little say on the cover design. I was shown two, both of which I loved. Another thing you won't know until the first royalty statement comes in is how many copies you have actually sold. Which is probably for the best...

• **They may want you to produce the next book insanely quickly.** I write cosy crime and publishers seem to like knowing they have another novel in the bag before publication day so keen readers can be directed towards it. This is why I'm currently finishing my third Piddlington Gazette mystery, although my first was only published in November 2025. Even if you're not contracted for a series,

interested publishers and agents will want to know your ideas for future novels – so make sure you have some.

• **Structural or developmental edits.** Unless your name is a combination of the words Austen and Jane, or maybe Osman and Richard, expect this trial to be visited on you. You may be asked to make 'just' a few changes, move a chapter, axe a character or – as happened with my first novel – 'actually put a dead body in it, please'. Leaving aside the Olympic-standard heavy lifting that the word 'just' does here, if you're like me,



# Author



your first instinct will be to consider getting a solicitor to look over your contract with a view to wriggling out of it before spending the next 24 hours in a corner going wibble. Fear not, your journo work has survived many a back bench. Once you've made them, these changes will make your book read better, shine more brightly and sell more copies. Promise.

• **The 'gram - and all social media's works.** Publishers do have marketing departments but they are usually so busy that all they can do is a few weeks' intense promo before the next book comes along. Consequently, you'll be expected to be all over your publicity like a case of new variant covid. Familiarise yourself with the scary sight of your face and voice on film by recording videos as you walk along, commenting on what you can see. Also, practise holding up your novel and talking about it to your phone's camera. A little grip tripod and stand – they cost around £25 – are very useful here and so is the advice from Nicola Washington of the uber-helpful Too Much podcast for writers. She reassures that the cringe is real so I made my Insta-reluctance the focal point of several truly awful reels, which you can see @faitheckersallauthor.

• **Casting the audiobook.** Interestingly, publishers do seem to ask your opinion on this one. But, unless your yarn is predicted to sell millions, they probably won't cast Hugh Grant as the narrator, even if the main character sounds just like him.

• **Meeting your publisher.** You will, but it may not be in person for a while. A successful writer friend told me he knew

## Useful Addresses

### • Creative writing courses/advice:

jerichowriters.com;  
www.curtisbrown.co.uk; www.faber.co.uk/faber-academy; www.indienovella.co.uk/writing-course (this one is free)

### • Social media podcast for writers:

https://nicolawashington.substack.com/podcast

### • Industry news:

thebookseller.com; bookbrunch.co.uk

### • Agents:

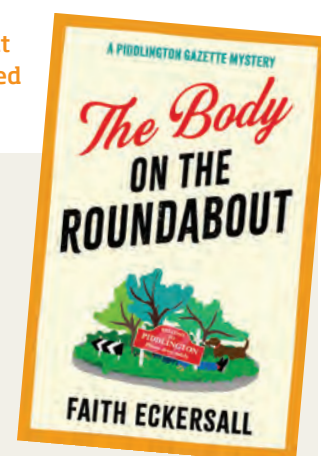
https://agentsassoc.co.uk

he'd made it when, instead of imbibing coffee at the imprint's poky annexe, he was invited to quaff champagne inside the main building on the top floor.

• **Other writers.** They are not your professional rivals but your potential friends. You'll find them on Facebook, in your publisher's WhatsApp chat group and on Instagram. Help them, review their novels graciously and they will reciprocate. Ditto bookstagrammers, the people who organise blog tours and the blessed souls who run independent bookshops. Make time for them and promote their work whenever you can.

• **You'll never really believe it.** I don't suffer with imposter syndrome because I know who did the work to get me here. But I still find myself wondering whether to enter competitions to find an agent – then remember I now have one. I still read tips on how to get published even though I have been. No one prepares you for that moment when, after decades of writing, honing, learning, disappointment and dashed hopes, you look up and accept that you really, actually are that magical, wondrous thing – a novelist with a book out.

**The Body on the Roundabout** by Faith Eckersall is published by Embla Books



## How to up your chances of publication

• **Research the market.** Just read – books in the genre you'd like to write in, features about writing, all the advice dished out for free in newsletters by organisations such as Curtis Brown. Subscribe to The Bookseller's socials to see what books and writers are being acquired and by whom.

• **Write the damn book!** According to a YouGov survey, 60 per cent of British people want to pen a novel. However, 2021 research revealed that

only 30 in every thousand – three per cent – who say they want to write a book finish it. Of those 30 writers who make it to The End, it's thought a mere six go on to publish their tome. Therefore, the very act of completing a book puts you much nearer the winner's enclosure. How to accomplish this? There's only one way. Write. Every. Day.

• **Enter writing competitions.** They can be a great way to get your novel

noticed by the right people. Most offer at least a chat with an agent or a critique for the top three or five entrants as well as prize money, and some even offer publication.

• **Get an agent.** Stats around this vary but, essentially, agented novels are far more likely to be published. This is because agents now do a lot of the work in readying a book for submission (forget the old three chapters and synopsis malarkey for fiction – you'll

need a fully polished novel to send to publishers). They also know what individual editors are looking for. According to Harry Bingham of Jericho Writers, a typical New York or London agent receives about 2,000 submissions a year and may accept around two or three. So make your novel the best it can be, noting the format in which your chosen agent likes to be approached and the genre they are looking for. If they reject, go to the

Association of Authors' Agents, make a list of candidates and work backwards from the end of the alphabet – most writers begin with names starting with A. If that fails, remember that many publishers now accept direct submissions.

by **Mark Fisher**

# arts

## Books

### **The Future is Peace**

*Aziz Abu Sarah and Maoz Inon*  
Out now, *Canongate*

Two activists from either side of the Israel/Palestine divide, overcome their personal bereavements to make a joint declaration about the pathway to peace.

### **The Killing of the Reavey Brothers**

*Eugene Reavey and Ken Murray*  
Out now, *Mercier Press*

Fifty years ago, the Ulster Volunteer Force attacked a house in Whitecross, County Armagh, leading to the deaths

of John Martin, and Brian and Anthony Reavey. Their surviving brother, Eugene, has always alleged treachery and collusion. This book, co-written with NUJ member Ken Murray, makes his case.

### **Beyond the Darkness: Crimes from Another era**

*Mihran Mavian*  
Out now, *Gomidas Institute*

NUJ member Mike Jempson has translated the wartime memoir of an Armenian cobbler who joined the French Resistance and survived three Nazi death camps. The illustrated book is annotated to provide context about

the culture and politics of Armenia, France and Germany.

## Comedy

### **Palestine: Peace De Resistance**

*On tour, May 15–June 27*  
Sami Abu Wardeh mixes 'conflict, colonialism and clowning' in a highly rated polemical show about his Palestinian heritage. "Stories of resistance are more important than ever today," he says.



## Exhibitions

### **Taylor Wessing Irish Photo Prize**

*Photo Museum Ireland, Dublin*  
Until May 24  
In its inaugural year, the prize takes inspiration from the Irish proverb 'Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine'

('It is in each other's shadows that we live'). On show are the winners plus the 30 shortlisted artists.

### **Lisa Barnard: The Canary and the Hammer**

*The Photographers' Gallery, London*  
May 8–31

Beauty, greed and politics come into focus as Lisa Barnard, who teaches documentary photography at the University of South Wales, considers the role of gold in a post-financial crisis world. Travelling to four continents, she discovers environmental destruction and human exploitation.

## Extraction

*Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh*  
Until July 26

Group exhibition in an out-of-town gallery considering the optimism and ideologies behind the 19th-century shale oil industry, the 20th-century North Sea petroleum economy and the renewable energy systems of today.

## Photo London

*Olympia, London*  
May 14–17

The UK's largest photography event moves to bigger premises for a mix of vintage prints, gallery displays and work from today's leading practitioners, centred on the Photo London Master of Photography award. The event includes a talk by photojournalist Sir Don McCullin, known for his images of war and working-class life.

## Festivals

**Chester Literature Festival**  
May 12–June 14

Among the headliners are historian and journalist Kate Williams, wildlife presenter and cameraman



Hamza Yassim and broadcaster John Craven, sharing the 'stories behind the headlines' from 50 years in the job.

## In depth

# Strikers on stage

It lasted seven months and became an inspiring story of industrial strength. On February 5 1981, the workers at the Lee Jeans factory in Greenock, 25 miles west of Glasgow, locked themselves in.

The 240-strong mainly female workforce had got wind of plans by their bosses to shut down the plant and move production to Northern Ireland.

Despite a reasonably healthy order book, the American Vanity Fair Corporation wanted to cash in on government grants - as it had when it moved to Greenock in the first place. The staff were having none of it.

Furious that management had failed to engage with their compromise proposals,

they barricaded the door with plastic chairs and occupied the building.

Unemployment among women in Greenock stood at more than 13 per cent; there was a lot to defend.

Their action became a *cause celebre* for the labour movement, with everyone from trades unionists to Labour leader Michael Foot rallying to their support - even if the leadership of the National

Union of Tailor and Garment Workers were ambivalent about such a grassroots rebellion.

After a management buyout, the workers were reinstated and the sit-in ended in August.

Now, 45 years later, the story is being told by playwright Frances Poet and the National Theatre of Scotland in *Stand & Deliver: the Lee Jeans Sit-In*. Directed by Jemima Levick, the play focuses on real-life shop steward Helen Monaghan and her colleague Maggie Wallace, the worker who climbed

out of the factory to order 240 fish suppers for the hungry strikers.

As well as political intent, the play aims to capture the youthful spirit, humour and imagination of the workers and a period soundtrack is performed by the actor-musicians.

Commemorating an even bigger dispute is NUJ member Ed Waugh, whose show, *Centenary*, marks the 100th anniversary of the start of the general strike.

Staged by Wisecrack Productions for one night only, the production is a compendium of songs, sketches and stand-up, commemorating the nine-day campaign by 1.7 million workers in 1926.

**Stand & Deliver: The Lee Jeans Sit-In, on tour until June**  
**Centenary, Glasshouse, Gateshead, May 4**



## Music

### Las Poderosas – Colombian Queens

Barbican, London  
May 4

A Colombian night headlined by the Caribbean rhythms of Adriana Lucía. Also on the bill is Nidia Góngora, specialising in ancestral marimba sounds, and Isabel Ramírez, aka La Muchacha, an activist singer, whose folk songs protest against everything from environmental destruction to right-wing paramilitaries.

## Theatre

### Kenmure Street

Oran Mor, Glasgow, and Lemon Tree, Aberdeen  
May 11–23

Verbatim lunchtime play by Simon Jay recalling the day in 2021 when a Glasgow street was brought to a standstill by protesters who prevented the Home Office from removing two men in an immigration raid. The same story has just been told on film in Everybody to Kenmure Street.



### Mother Courage and her Children Shakespeare's Globe, London May 7–June 27

Bertolt Brecht's parable about the economic prerogative of war stars artistic director Michelle Terry as a woman trading her way through the 30 years' war. Elle While directs the translation by Anna Jordan.

### An Ideal Husband Gate, Dublin May 8–July 11

Director Marc Atkinson Borrull leans into the modern-day resonances of Oscar Wilde's play about an insider-trading politician and the blackmail plot to shame him.

## Spotlight

### Franco's artist foes

Established in London in 1933 in the wake of the Great Depression, the Artists' International Association (AIA) was a left-wing network dedicated to peace, democracy and cultural development.

In those interwar years, its members were concerned about the rise of fascism. They were prominent in the fight against Franco in the Spanish Civil War and the rise of Hitler in Germany.

At the Towner Eastbourne, their work is being commemorated in the

most comprehensive exhibition of its kind.

Taking its name from Andy Friend's Comrades in Art: Artists Against Fascism 1933–1943 published last year, it is the first display in over 40 years to focus on the AIA.

The artists were united in left-wing sympathies more than artistic styles, which promises an eclectic exhibition. Works on



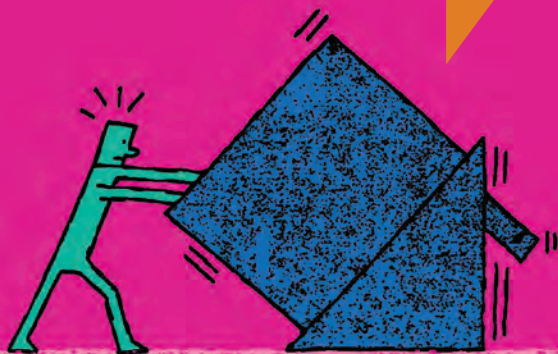
display include those by surrealist Ithell Colquhoun, realist Laura Knight, modernist Paul Nash and landscape artist Lucien Pissarro, as well by ALA founding members, who included caricaturists, designers and illustrators.

Where today's art industry is often linked to high finance, these artists were committed to connecting with ordinary people – and they attracted the attentions of MIS.

A smaller collection is also on display in London's Tate Britain.

**Comrades in Art: Artists Against Fascism, Towner, Eastbourne, May 7–October 18**

# Moved house or changed your email address?



**Please let us know.**

You can update your membership record on the website [nuj.org.uk](http://nuj.org.uk) or email [membership@nuj.org.uk](mailto:membership@nuj.org.uk)

**NUJ**  
NATIONAL UNION  
OF  
JOURNALISTS

# Southwell, Tyrrell & Co.

## Tax Consultants

We are an established firm based in the City, specialising in handling the taxation and accountancy affairs of freelance journalists. We have clients throughout the UK.

We can help and advise on the new changes under Making Tax Digital including helping to set up the MTD compatible software and bookkeeping.

Our services include accounts preparation, tax reporting, business start-ups and advice on possible incorporation, payroll services, management accounts, bookkeeping and more.

**For further details, contact us on**  
**T 020 7606 9787**  
**E [info@southwell-tyrrell.co.uk](mailto:info@southwell-tyrrell.co.uk)**

BARBARA COOK / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



## John O

Pioneering industrial activist John O died in February following a long illness. He was 82.

John, a long-time member of the NUJ, changed his surname to O by deed poll in solidarity with those seeking asylum in Britain. He spent his life campaigning for justice, not only for those seeking asylum but also for those in prison – whatever the charge – and for whom he wrote a regular newsletter.

A strong member of the anti-fascist movement, he was coordinator for No Deportations

– Residence Papers for All, a campaign group for educating the public on immigration, asylum and anti-deportation. His bulletins brought together news articles and views from individuals, organisations and campaigns.

In 1996, he founded the non-political, non-funded MOJUK (Miscarriages of Justice UK) to keep alive the stories of prisoners affected.

John once drove a bus to help during the mass picket of the Saltley Gate coke works in Birmingham where thousands of striking miners and engineers scored a historic victory. Miners from all over the country closed the works, and the workers went on to win wage rises of more than 40 per cent.

He rarely missed a meeting of the NUJ Birmingham and Coventry branch, despite his deteriorating health, and attended the union's delegate meeting several times.

A supporter of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, John was central to the growth of the West Midlands Anti-Deportation Campaign. For two decades under his leadership (although he would definitely not have called it that), the coalition provided daily practical and

personal support to individuals facing deportation. It produced national bulletins and helped to build a national movement.

Chris Morley, northern and Midlands organiser, said: "On first meeting, John O could seem austere and imposing but he was very generous of spirit and loyal to the NUJ and labour movement and it was always good to hear his informed opinions on any given dispute or progressive issue. He was a solid trade unionist, generous with his time to our movement and courageous in his own life battling cancer and progressive cognitive problems for a few of his last years."

Branch chair Barbara Goulden said: "John was a fierce fighter for justice for adults and children in poverty and one of our most loyal members. He was delightfully eccentric with his Mohican-style haircuts and wearing the occasional string vest. His LinkedIn account gave a clue to his playful humour – under the 'languages' section, he declared 'Effin & Blinding – professional working proficiency'."

"John was often frustrated that members were not as active as they once might have been, but times had changed and working

conditions for journalists are certainly being pushed to the limits.

"With his surname change, John O may have given the odd bank manager cause for concern when signing cheques but nobody had any doubt that his heart was in the right place. He was known to cycle to hospital for a dose of chemotherapy before jumping back on his bike to get back home in time to join the monthly branch Zoom meeting."

John had attended the West Midlands Pensioners' Convention, where fellow members held a minute's silence in his honour at their March meeting. Delegates told their favourite stories about John, who was always up for action.

During a campaign to keep free TV licences for the over 75s, convention members were picketing the BBC Mailbox studios and John was arguing they should occupy the building and hold a sit-down protest. Just as he was urging them to 'blockade the building', staff came out and invited them in for a cup of tea and a sit down – then proceeded to listen to their grievances – much to John's annoyance.

### Barbara Goulden and Chris Morley

JANINA STRUK



## Alan Slingsby

Alan Slingsby, who has died aged 76, designed and laid out *The Journalist* for two decades until 2009, took over and ran a much-valued community newspaper, and was editor or production editor for a host of publications. Alan is pictured above with former *Journalist* editor Tim Gopsill (centre) and myself.

As a teenager, he went on the Aldermaston CND marches. After editing the student newspaper at the University of Manchester, he worked on the *Morning Star*, followed by jobs editing magazines

for the National Union of Students, the Inner London Education Authority, the National Union of Teachers and, finally, the Society of Civil and Public Servants.

Then he went freelance, for clients including the NUJ, the Fire Brigades Union, the University of the Third Age and the Ben Uri Gallery.

Though he parted company with the Communist Party, his commitment to trade unions and to working for a better world never left him, and was behind what was probably the biggest venture of his life: the *Brixton Blog* and *Bugle*, which he and his wife Linda Quinn took over in 2016 – although, to Alan's regret, it is now only online as the *Brixton Blog*. He threw all his energy, skills and resources into building a much-loved local publication.

He never took payment for this. He did it because he was sure the community in Brixton, where he lived for the last 44 years of his life, would benefit from it – and because he believed passionately in the

importance of local news, written to the same exacting standards as the best in international reporting.

He was always the first on scene for a local story, even when his health was starting to fail. The *Brixton Blog* and *Bugle* proved serious local journalism can exist and that small yet thoroughly professional teams can fill the gaps left by declining local papers.

Linda died in 2021, and Alan kept it going. Now the trustees say: "Without his energy, skills and commitment, we are not able to keep it going." They have launched a fundraiser to create a permanent archive of its journalism.

A huge amount of Alan's time went into work he did without payment. His talent and skill were always available for campaigns he thought important – in recent years, for justice for the Palestinian people – or to help out friends.

I was one of the many friends who had cause to be grateful to him. When, late in life, I started writing and staging plays on the

London fringe, Alan refused payment for the marvellous leaflets and programmes he created for me.

We met in the 1970s, when he was on the *Morning Star*. Four decades later, we worked together to produce the magazine *Third Age Matters* for the University of the Third Age. I was editor. He was production editor, designer and chief sub.

As a journalist, he was fast, professional, creative, absolutely reliable, obsessively accurate, unfussy, quick to find out what use every technological advance could be and a joy to work with. As a citizen, he had strong beliefs and utter integrity, as well as a vision of a better society regardless of evidence that things were getting worse. As a friend, he was talkative, entertaining, kind, thoughtful, generous and loyal.

• *Donations in Alan's memory can be made to Medical Aid for Palestinians or the Brixton Blog:* <https://brixtonblog.com/save-the-brixton-blog-bugle-archive-campaign>

### Francis Beckett



# We can all be hypocrites when it comes to gossip

Chappell Roan means tittle-tattle but Lucretia Borgia represents culture, says **Chris Proctor**

**W**hy is new gossip low-brow trivia and old gossip first-rate stuff that wins plaudits on University Challenge?

I met my old journalist friend Linda in the Wallace collection for a cultural interlude, which turned quickly into a moan marathon. We grumbled how news is often nothing but tittle-tattle. What's this fascination with the goings-on of so-called celebrities?

Did we care that Teyana Taylor and Aaron Pierre weren't talking and there was possibly a rift between Jesy Nelson and Zion Foster? This wasn't news, we fumed (quietly given our surroundings).

Neither of us was affected by these stories nor exclaimed, 'How awful,' 'How sad' or 'I'm not surprised', possibly as we had not heard of the principals.

We paused, putting aside our pique to peruse portraiture.

"Oh look," Linda remarked, pointing at a picture of a rather natty chap wearing an ornate yellow jacket and matching fascinator. "Isn't that Dudley? Earl of Leicester?" We edged forward to investigate the brushwork.

She sucked in her cheeks and tapped her nose with a forefinger. "Dudley," she said. "He was the..." (heavy stress) "... consort of Elizabeth." Her lips pursed. "The 'virgin queen'... by reputation, at least."

"It's attributed to Steven van der Meulen," I read.

"At least it's attributed."

"No, he's the painter of the picture, not the source of the story."

We glanced at François Boucher's Madame de Pompadour. No better than she should be, we observed.

Returning to our discussion, I brought up – and, indeed, nearly vomited at – the coverage given to a lady called Chappell Roan (although this is apparently fake news and her real name is Kylie, Kayleigh or possibly Ceilidh. I wouldn't give her the satisfaction of looking her up).

So what makes this woman an object of fascination? She looks like a character from the opening scene of Macbeth (to continue the cultural theme) and says she's a lesbian. So what? If a plumber comes to our house – and more often than not they don't – I never ask about their leisure-time activities and show no interest in their romantic pursuits. I want my drip stopped. Who does it is immaterial compared with when.

I feel the same way about Ms Roan's musical metier. Music is an auditory pastime. I never ponder the sexuality of the French horn. I simply don't want to know. Reporting it is gossip masquerading as news.

We paused by Jacques Charlier's Diana and Nymphs Bathing.

"No sign of that odious Actaeon lurking behind the bushes getting an eyeful," Linda remarks. "He deserved everything he got, the dirty little peeping Tom."

"He said it was an accident."

"Of course he did. Men are like that."

"He might have just been passing..."

"If he'd been passing, he wouldn't have hung around long enough to be discovered, would he? I mean if you accidentally popped into my bathroom and found me naked in the shower, what would you do?"

"I'd congratulate you on your plumber."

"He was a lewd voyeur and, if anyone merited being turned into a deer, it was him."

We moved to another room, taking time away from culture to attempt to

calculate how many words had been written about the Epstein affair. Millions. Hundreds of millions. A lot more than about the Crimean War for example. When all that was needed was 'pervert', 'exploiter' and 'remember the victims'.

Linda wondered how many times the phrase 'The appearance of this name in the files does not imply wrongdoing' had been flaunted. And it's quite right – being present doesn't mean guilt. Besides, Linda and I are not the sort of people who'd grub around these salacious stories. All the same, we did seem to know quite a lot about British businessmen, global pop stars, analytic philosophers, aristocratic types and others who might have been chums with Mr E. Neither of us could explain why. Perhaps, Actaeon-like, we'd spotted it accidentally as we passed by.

Still on tour, we came upon a small portrait of Lucretia Borgia. Say no more. Some of the tales about her defy belief, but we exchanged them anyway. This took us onto Penelope and a discussion of her resistance of 108 suitors while Odysseus was overseas – 108 suitors and no hanky-panky? Maybe. And what about the time Hephaestus caught the missus and Ares at it? Not to mention that Zeus fellow whose appetite for innocent nymphs was, reputedly, prodigious.

I congratulated Linda on the breadth of her knowledge of myths both Roman and Greek. She explained it was vital to keep up to date with the out-of-date if you're cultured.

Over a coffee in the glass-roofed courtyard, we concluded our condemnation of the gossip, innuendo and downright smut that is perused by modern media consumers, regretted its proliferation by our own profession and, making an excuse, left the gallery.

**No sign of that odious Actaeon lurking behind the bushes. He deserved everything he got, the dirty little peeping Tom**

# Travel Insurance for Over 50s

All ages. All conditions. All destinations.

- ✓ Voted UK's No.1 for Customer Care<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ 24/7 English-speaking emergency helpline
- ✓ Trusted by millions for 25 years



Not all Travel Insurance is the same



Call our UK Team 7 days a week FREE 

# 0800 249 4681

AllClearTravel.co.uk

# AllClear<sup>TM</sup>

AllClear Gold Plus and Platinum achieved Which? Best Buy. AllClear Gold Plus and Platinum has been 5 Star rated by Defaqto.

<sup>1</sup> Discount applies to base premium of AllClear branded policies only. Discount expires at 23:59 on 31/07/26. <sup>2</sup> UK Broker Awards, Customer Service Award 2025. For more information please refer to T&Cs at AllClearTravel.co.uk.